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VIET CONG MANPOWER RECRUITMENT

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21 November 1966

Office of Research and Reports
Central Intelligence Agency

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The purpose of this memorandum is to evaluate the capabilities of the Viet Cong to recruit manpower for military purposes from sources within South Vietnam and to assess the current rate at which manpower is being recruited and trained.

Recruitment Capability

The South Vietnamese population under VC control is at least 3.5 million people and could be as much as five million people, depending on the extent to which the VC have access to contested areas. Most of the VC controlled population live in the delta region. The controlled population probably contains some 500,000 physically fit young males. An additional 30,000-35,000 youths annually become old enough to fight. In addition to this population the VC can also draw on the population of military age in contested areas, on GVN deserters and on recruits from urban areas.

On the basis of data on the build-up of Viet Cong military forces since 1961, VC personnel losses, and infiltration from North Vietnam, we have estimated that probably 40,000 personnel were recruited annually during 1961-64. During 1965 a sharp build-up of Viet Cong and NVA forces along with the intensification of the ground war in South Vietnam increased the VC manpower requirement significantly.

To meet this requirement the VC were forced to resort to monetary inducements, to forced conscription and to returnee programs. With these new methods the VC were able to attain a significantly higher level of local recruitment -- at least 120,000 in 1965 or three times the average level of previous years. On this basis and with its available manpower

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resources we estimate that the VC had a capability in 1966 to recruit and train some 7,000 to 10,000 personnel a month.

Recruitment at this rate is probably close to the maximum capabilities of the VC. Several constraints combine to place this ceiling on VC recruitment capability. Among them are the increasing manpower losses being sustained by Viet Cong forces, the deterioration of VC political control resulting from allied military operations, and an apparent VC requirement to meet at least part of the ^NVVA troop losses in South Vietnam.

Manpower Requirements

There is little hard intelligence on the actual rates at which VC recruitment takes place. A requirement for recruitment and one which obviously was met can be determined by examining the build-up of VC forces from 1961 through 1965 and the estimated losses sustained by the Viet Cong during the same period. These figures are shown in the following tabulation:

Viet Cong Manpower Requirements

in thousands

<u>Year</u>	<u>Annual Force Increases a/</u>	<u>Estimated Losses b/</u>
1961	28	24
1962	16	37
1963	13	35
1964	34	35-40
1965	<u>54</u>	<u>80-90</u>
Total	145	211-226

a. Based on DIA/JCS OB figures.

b. DIA/JCS figures 1961-1963, adjusted to include seriously wounded. 1964-65 figures are CIA estimates.

The total manpower requirement during these five years -- to expand the VC main and guerrilla forces and to replace losses -- was in the order of 355,000-370,000 men or an average monthly requirement during the period of about ⁶8,000 persons.

This estimate is based on current order of battle holdings. A reappraisal of the strength of Communist irregular forces which is currently underway indicates that MACV estimates of the strength of irregular forces may have understated their growth drastically, probably by as much as 200,000 persons. If this be the case, the build-up of Communist forces during the 1961-65 period would have required recruitment at a monthly rate of 9,000-9,500 persons. These requirements are well within the currently estimated Viet Cong capability to recruit and train from 7,000 to 10,000 personnel a month. Additional thousands were recruited during the period to form the VC political/military cadre and combat support units which include from 60-90,000 persons.

The recruitment burden for the Viet Cong has varied sharply during the period, ranging from at least 40,000 a year during 1961-64 to over 120,000 a year in 1965, the year of their greatest force increase and the year during which estimated manpower losses more than doubled.

1965 also marks a leveling off in the estimated build-up of VC regular forces. Although they will increase only by about 5,000 personnel in 1966 the increasing casualties being sustained by the VC will ~~help~~ ^{keep} the manpower requirement at about 1965 levels. We estimate that Viet Cong forces will suffer manpower losses of from 90-100,000 personnel during 1966. This yields a total manpower requirement of from 95-105,000 personnel

to be replaced. In addition the Viet Cong may be required to provide replacements for a growing number of NVA losses. During 1966 it is estimated that the NVA losses will range from 30,000-35,000, at the same time that the NVA force level will expand by an estimated 49,000 troops. To meet this requirement the NVA has drastically increased its infiltration of personnel. Estimated infiltration in 1966 will almost certainly exceed 65,000 persons and could be as high as 95,000.* Depending on which infiltration figure is reached, the Viet Cong could be called upon to provide as many as 15,000 troops to compensate NVA losses.

* These figures are projections based on the current MACV estimates of NVA infiltration in the two categories "accepted" and "passible", through September 1966.

Probable Scale of Recruitment

The precise extent to which any of these manpower requirements is satisfied by local recruitment cannot be determined. The recruitment goals of the VC are not being met fully and this is reflected in the increased frequency of reporting on VC recruitment difficulties and their recourse during 1965 to forced conscription and monetary inducements.

All of the VC manpower losses do not represent a true military recruitment problem since a large number of the estimated losses are probably civilians -- either innocent victims of military action or labor engaged in logistic support activities and recruited for short-term periods. Some of the manpower losses are undoubtedly compensated by upgrading personnel assigned to irregular units and transferring them to main and local force units.

A rough approximation of the casualties to be sustained during 1966 by VC main and local forces is from 35,000 - 40,000. If these regular forces also expand by 5,000 troops during 1966, the manpower requirement for main and local forces alone would be in the order of 3,000 - 4,000 troops a month.

Replacement at this level is not an overous quantitative drain on VC manpower resources. Some 30,000 youth annually reach recruitment age in VC controlled areas. The burden is even smaller if the irregular forces total as much as 300,000 persons. The

upgrading of irregular forces at a rate of 3,000 - 4,000 troops a month would probably mean, however, that the VC regular forces will have greater numbers of poorly or hastily trained personnel and that the VC will be hard pressed to maintain a high degree of skilled military cadre. In one of the few captured documents giving meaningful aggregative data on annual recruitment in a VC province, total recruitment in 1965 amounted to 1.5 percent of the total population controlled by the VC. Recruitment specifically for military purposes (including militia and self-defense forces) was just over one percent of the population. Recruitment at this level is undoubtedly far short of the rates needed to meet recruitment targets.* But even recruitment at these low rates would provide nationally from 35,000 - 50,000 personnel annually, an amount more than sufficient to maintain the force strength of VC main and local force units. A few isolated reports on recruitment programs indicate that recruitment targets in 1965 were generally fulfilled by at least 50 percent. In Binh Dinh province, for example, the percentage of population joining the guerrilla forces had reached only 3.3 percent of the lowland population and 5.1 percent of the highland population -- compared to targets of 5 and 10 percent respectively. Nevertheless, captured documents indicate that the province regarded recruitment as having allowed marked increases in 1965 in the strength of guerrilla and militia forces.

* Some of the recruitment goals are guerrillas: 5 percent of the population in lowland areas, 2 percent in cities and towns and 10 percent in highland areas.

- 6 -